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RR RUEHDE RUEHDIR  
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ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 221451Z AUG 07  
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9797  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001285

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS ARRESTED FOR BLOG REMARKS CRITICIZING  
AMIR

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On August 18, members of the Kuwait State Security (KSS) Department arrested two journalists outside the offices of Al-Jarida newspaper. The KSS arrested the first journalist, Bashar Al-Sayegh, for publishing remarks on his website critical of the Amir. They arrested the second journalist, Jassem Al-Qames, for taking pictures of the incident. The KSS released Al-Qames on August 20 and Al-Sayegh on August 21. Post has learned that the KSS also arrested Nawaf Al-Ajmi, a corporal in the Kuwait Army, who posted the disparaging remarks. Members of the Kuwait National Democratic Coalition (NDC) staged a protest on August 20, and the Kuwait Society for Human Rights (KSHR) issued a statement condemning the arrests. The Kuwaiti constitution and Kuwaiti press law forbids criticism of the Amir. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On August 18, the KSS arrested journalist and blogger Bashar Al-Sayegh as he was exiting the offices of Al-Jarida newspaper, where he works as an editor. According to press reports, an anonymous author posted comments critical of the Amir on Al-Sayegh's personal website ([www.alommah.org](http://www.alommah.org)), although Al-Sayegh is reported to have removed them within three hours. The media reported that Al-Sayegh received advanced warning of his impending arrest, and that his friend Jassem Al-Qames, a photographer for Al-Jarida newspaper, accompanied him as he exited the Al-Jarida offices. Al-Qames said that the KSS officers did not identify themselves, and that they threw Al-Sayegh into their car as he exited the building. Al-Qames said that when he protested and began taking photographs of the incident, the KSS agents arrested him as well. The KSS released Al-Qames on August 20, who subsequently claimed that the KSS interrogated and physically abused him during his detention. Bashar Al-Sayegh was released on bail on August 21. Media reports state that Al-Sayegh provided KSS with the IP address of the author of the anti-Amir comments, but that KSS is still investigating his involvement in the incident.

¶3. (U) During an August 21 courtesy call by the Charge and PAO on Jassim Boodai, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Rai newspaper, Post learned that the KSS also arrested Nawaf Al-Ajmi, a corporal in the Kuwait Army, for allegedly posting the disparaging remarks. Mr. Boodai said that Al-Ajmi's posting referred to the Amir as a "slave to the merchant class" who is nothing but a "wax figure who belongs in a museum." Boodai also claimed that allegations of KSS abuse were false and that the Ministry of Interior had "acted professionally." Boodai said that Al-Sayegh was "way behind the red line" since he did not review the comments beforehand and allowed criticism of the Amir to be posted on his website. The arrests have dominated press headlines over the past two days. Al-Sayegh's release made headlines in many newspapers, which featured photos of him being carried on the shoulders of his supporters upon his release from the KSS facility. On August 22, Al-Sayegh released a statement denying abuse or

torture during his detention.

¶4. (U) The NDC led a protest of human rights activists, members of Parliament and other concerned individuals outside the KSS offices on August 20. In addition, MP Ahmad Al-Mulaifi registered his disappointment with the incident, and noted that Kuwait was previously the envy of the GCC for its press freedom. MP Ahmad Al-Saadoun called for the elimination of the KSS. The KSHR issued a statement condemning the manner of the arrests and criticizing the actions of the KSS officers. The Kuwait Journalists' Association (KJA) also released a statement condemning the arrests and calling the incident a black mark on Kuwait's tradition of press freedom.

¶5. (U) According to Article 54 of the Kuwaiti constitution, the Amir is "immune and inviolable," meaning that he is beyond any personal criticism or accountability. In addition, Kuwait's new press law (approved in 2006) bans the jailing of journalists for all but criticisms of the Amir, religious offenses and sedition. It stipulates jail terms of up to one year and fines from US \$17,000 - \$70,000 for these offenses. However, it also prohibits the arrest and detention of journalists until a final court verdict is rendered by the Kuwait Supreme Court.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: These arrests demonstrate that government censors and the Amiri Palace regularly monitor Kuwait's electronic media. In the past, media contacts have claimed that the Amir receives weekly reviews of what Kuwait bloggers are posting on a variety of issues. The media fanfare surrounding these arrests highlights a conflict in Kuwaiti society in general, and journalists in particular. While the media desires greater freedom, it still readily accepts laws

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that restrict freedom of speech, in particular when it pertains to religion and criticism of the Amir. These restrictions are so ingrained in the Kuwaiti media's consciousness that even the KJA did not call for a repeal of this aspect of the law, or call for greater accountability from the Amir, in its condemnation of the arrests. END COMMENT.

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